

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

November 6, 2020

Dr. Robert Redfield
Director
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
1600 Clifton Road
Atlanta, GA 30329

Dr. Redfield:

We are grateful for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) efforts to ensure that U.S. Territories in the Pacific and Freely Associated States (FAS) are prepared to receive and distribute an approved COVID-19 vaccine. However, we are concerned that the execution of a multi-phase distribution strategy in each of the jurisdictions in the Pacific may not adequately take into consideration the unique needs of the region nor leverage existing partnerships that may make vaccine distribution successful.

The Pacific region is vast and includes more than half a million people living on thousands of islands across 5 time zones. The US Affiliated Pacific Islands (USAPI) in this region is comprised of the territories of Guam, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, American Samoa, and FAS of the Republic of Palau, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and the Federated States of Micronesia.

Because of the unique needs of the U.S. Territories in the Pacific and FAS, a multi-phased vaccine distribution strategy may require additional support from CDC and other federal Operation Warp Speed (OWS) partners. Moreover, given the remoteness of each Pacific jurisdiction, finite availability of flights, and limited ultra-cold chain capabilities, distributing small amounts of vaccine in multiple phases may prove to be unnecessarily costly and inefficient.

The CDC has maintained that all jurisdictions should be ready to receive initial vaccine distributions by November 15. With that target date approaching fast, and the CDC having completed its review of all jurisdictions' submitted vaccine distribution plans, we would like to know the following:

1. Will the CDC pursue a regional strategy for U.S. Territories in the Pacific and FAS, leveraging established relationships across Region IX and with PIHOA?

Throughout the pandemic, the Pacific Islander Health Officers' Association (PIHOA) has organized and led a Pacific regional response to the COVID-19 pandemic. PIHOA's work enabled the Pacific region to quickly scale up testing infrastructure in the early days of the pandemic at

a time when testing relied solely on capacity at the Public Health Labs in Guam and Hawaii. Because of these early successes, the Pacific region has been operating in lockstep, employing a regional mitigation strategy that has been effective. We want to make sure CDC will leverage these established relationships, or coordinate similar regional cooperation, when distributing the vaccine.

2. Does the Department of Defense, State Department, and any other federal OWS partner plan to distribute vaccines to their personnel currently based in the USAPI? If so, how are those plans being coordinated with CDC's strategy to distribute vaccine to the public?

The Pacific region is vast and ultra-cold chain infrastructure is extremely limited. Moreover, much of the Pacific region depends on tourism and international commerce, meaning economies are effectively shut down. In the case of the FAS, borders are closed. Given these obstacles and the anticipated scarcity of vaccine availability in the early days of distribution, coordination among all federal agencies is key. Leveraging the capabilities of multiple federal agencies in a thoughtful way would make a mass vaccination effort possible given these obstacles, lead to operational efficiency that would ensure vaccines reach populations in a timely and efficient manner, and realize cost savings for the federal government. Mass vaccination would also best enable the USAPI with small and relatively contained populations to quickly and safely open for business. We are concerned that siloed efforts by CDC and federal OWS partners (such as FEMA) could result in wasted effort and vaccine.

3. Will the CDC leverage its procurement authority to consolidate the purchasing power of the USAPI to ensure that purchase orders for vaccines, ultra-cold chain infrastructure and any ancillary supplies are filled in a timely manner?

In the early months of the pandemic, PIHOA, in partnership with your agency and other federal partners, successfully coordinated the procurement and reallocation of GeneXpert testing kits and personal protective equipment for the entire Pacific region. This level of regional cooperation ensured the timely receipt of testing kits and ancillary supplies needed to carry out a robust testing and contact tracing strategy in each Pacific jurisdiction. Such consolidation was vital because private companies pursued large, easy-to-deliver contract orders, and deprioritized fulfillment of smaller orders in remote areas, such as Island communities in the Pacific. Therefore, we request CDC work with federal partners to make plans for consolidating vaccine orders from industry now, in order to ensure that enough vaccine can be procured and reallocated in a timely manner.

4. Will the CDC deploy personnel to assist the USAPI with vaccine roll-out, including by providing technical assistance for reporting into the "Tiberius" system being developed to track the COVID-19 vaccine development and distribution? Are there plans to include personnel with vaccine drop shipments?

We are aware that CDC has identified several jurisdictions that may need virtual or on the ground support for vaccine distribution. Multi-disciplinary CDC teams are a force multiplier and can fill key skill gaps including IT, lab, logistics, epidemiology, primary prevention/care, and risk communications. A successful vaccination campaign may depend on the availability of skilled personnel, especially in the FAS. Further, given the limited size of the vaccine, with proper consolidation and coordination, personnel could be deployed with vaccine drop shipments. This would alleviate concerns of limited infrastructure and lack of ultra-cold chain capabilities on site. Deploying personnel with vaccine shipments would also mitigate the risk that vaccines will be mishandled.

We ask that you please share with us how the CDC is incorporating these considerations, and any other needs of the USAPI into the vaccine distribution process. We look forward to your response no later than November 13.

Sincerely,



Gregorio Kilili Camacho Sablan
Member of Congress



Raúl M. Grijalva
Member of Congress



Aumua Amata Coleman Radewagen
Member of Congress



Barbara Lee
Member of Congress



Judy Chu
Member of Congress



Ami Bera, M.D.
Member of Congress